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NOTES ON THE PRESENT-DAY EASTER ISLANDERS

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EASTER ISLAND, or Rapa-nui, is one of the most isolated high islands in all of Polynesia, being approximately 2,100 miles west of Chile and 1,100 miles east of Pitcairn, the nearest inhabited island to the west. Discovered by Roggeveen in 1722 and visited during the 18th and 19th centuries by such well known Pacific explorers as Cook, La Pérouse, and Beechy, its extreme isolation, tree-barren slopes, and, quite possibly, its lack of good anchorage kept European contact to a minimum. Even today regular contact with the outside world is an annual affair conducted by the Chilean Navy. For years the island was virtually ignored, except for some Catholic missionaries, until Chile, in 1888, took formal possession. Easter Island has, however, never been truly occupied by Chile in the sense of maintaining a permanent settlement of continentals. In time Chile came to lease over four-fifths of the island to a British wool-growing company, and the natives were relegated to the remainder of the land around Hangaroa village. This commercial arrangement continued until 1954 when the government refused to renew the lease and turned over the running of the island, including the sheep ranch, to its Navy personnel.

As a result of the lack of interest in colonization, and the development of ranching interests, the island's foreign population has been kept small. In 1917 there were twenty-one Whites on the island, in 1922 only six, in 1934 thirteen, and today about 30.[1] Except for the church, and the founding of a regular government school in 1934,[2] there appears to have been little intentional effort to convert the natives to Chilean culture. However, owing to the legally enforced requirement that the British wool company maintain a store with such native necessities as cloth, clothing, and various tools and equipment, the islanders came to depend more and more upon the annual shipment of these Chilean products, and less and less upon their environmentally impoverished homecraft manufactures. Owing in part to this situation, acculturation has moved steadily forward on the material culture level and, because it is readily observable, has tended to mask any lags that may exist in the social and psychological patterning of Rapa-nui culture.

1 I. Dropkin, *Contribution to the Demographic Study of Easter Island* (Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Occasional Papers, vol. 11, no. 12, p. 4, Honolulu, 1935).

2 *Idem*, p. 7.

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177 Today one's initial contact with Easter Island natives and their village of Hangaroa creates the definite illusion that here acculturation toward a Chilean pattern approaches completion and it is only a question of the government's passing the necessary laws to give them the right to vote until final absorption will be well on its way. Such traits as European style frame or cement-walled houses with corrugated-tin roofs, the full acceptance of the riding aspect of horse culture, the occasional use of ox carts and ox-drawn plows, and the complete acceptance of European style clothing, including well polished shoes on Sunday, reflect a more rural Continental setting than a Polynesian-inhabited island in the Pacific. Contacting the Chilean officials, one soon meets their native aides: mechanics who can take a Jeep apart and put it together again; a machinist renowned for fixing the most delicate wrist watches on the island; a budding meteorologist who, for the past two years, has been one of the instrument observers at the Chilean Air Force meteorological station. These are, to be sure, extreme cases, often representing men who have been sent to Chile for advanced education or who have made a living on the continent for several years. However, they fit so well into the observed modification toward Chilean culture that their somewhat extreme positions in the acculturation pattern are not readily apparent. Certainly Easter Island, [105] seen from an archaeologist's point of view, i.e., from the material culture evidence, presents a picture in 1956 of a dominantly Europeanized culture with a minor lag showing up in such things as the continued use of adzes, now made of steel, a customarily separate kitchen in the family architectural layout, a continued use of certain Polynesian foods, and a highly developed woodcarving tradition obviously kept alive by the products' salability to the tourists during their annual invasion of the island.

121 During the five month excavation season of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island, no time was available for an intensive study of Rapanui culture as it is today. However, through director Thor Heyerdahl's interest in aiding the islanders' economy by using them wherever possible, opportunity was made available to the archaeologists to gather ethnographic data. During my 115 excavation of various sites on the volcano of Rano Kao I employed four Easter 124 Islanders: Jorge Tepano, Roberto Tepano, Juan Atan, and Rafael Roe. These men, perforce, served as my informants, the periods of "interview" consisting of directed conversations while riding up the volcano to work, during the lunch hour, and again during the afternoon descent. These were occasionally supplemented by specific appointments, usually with Jorge Tepano, the most knowledgeable of the four. There was no time nor opportunity to cross-check my information with natives other than my four workers, so that the data presented below are

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not as complete as they might be, and may tend to be weighted in that all four men were related in one way or another. However this paper, and one on trading techniques which I hope to publish at a future date, show quite clearly that advanced acculturation on the island is, for the most part, only material culture deep and has as yet penetrated only sporadically into the social organization of the people.

BIRTH

Except for a ceremony at the birth of a first child, there appears to be no regularized ritual for births as such. At the present moment an expectant mother either goes to the Naval-run hospital for delivery, or stays at home where her child is delivered with the aid of a midwife. I could learn of no pre-natal or post-parture taboos enforced on either the parents or the child. The rubbing of a fine red iron oxide powder into the baby's navel may have once had ceremonial significance but is now explained as merely an aid in the drying up of the umbilical cord.

It is apparently only the first child, especially a boy child, whose birth is fraught with a danger that must be assuaged by ceremony. Once the ceremony has been completed, however, a time for general celebration and feasting is immediately at hand.

Upon the occasion of the first birth to a married couple the father-in-law of the child's mother immediately prepares a small *umu*, i.e., a meal prepared in a pit oven, which is allowed to cook through the night. At the break of dawn on the following day the immediate families of both the child's parents open the *umu* but do not touch the inclosed food until the new mother has first partaken of it to "bring luck to her baby." After she has eaten this token meal, these relatives finish this initial *umu* and immediately begin preparations for a large *umu* feast for their friends and relatives in celebration of the birth. As with the inter-familial exchange of gifts at the time of a wedding, the respective families of the new parents each prepare their own *umu* and, upon its completion, present it to the opposite family, after which both meals are pooled for the general feasting of friends and relatives. Since such a feast may have to provide for a large portion of the population, each member of the extended family may be called upon to furnish a quantity of food in the form of chickens, eggs, *camotes* or sweet potatoes, etc. Even friends may be called upon and "if they have food beyond their needs they will give to the *umu*." Each friend or relative coming to the feast brings with him, or her, a small *umu* gift for the new mother. This usually consists of a small, wrapped bundle containing chicken or, perhaps, *camote*. It was never made

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852 completely clear to me if these small gifts had to be cooked in a pit oven, or *umu*,
[431] or whether they were simply cooked food brought to this celebration, though I am inclined to feel that, considering the first ceremonial *umu*, they were probably especially prepared in a pit oven.

177 431 852 According to Jorge and Roberto, this ceremony is occasionally still performed as above but is gradually being supplanted by a modified version. This new pattern is best described by Jorge's plans for the celebration of a forthcoming first birth in the family of one of his recently married sons. Jorge explained that, upon the birth of the child, he would make a "table" of gifts for his son's father-in-law, and the father-in-law, in turn, would make a gift table for Jorge. These they would exchange at a party, and the exchanged gifts would then be distributed among the
[574] relatives of each father-in-law. The party, rather than being the traditional *umu*, would be a time when a little wine or liquor was served to the guests, and all would sing and dance during the evening. Whether or not Jorge would prepare the
[114] small *umu* for the first eating by the new mother could not be learned. Considering, however, that the Easter Islanders would feel that Chileans, and therefore all foreigners, would ridicule such a rite as superstitious, it is possible that Jorge's diffidence on the matter actually reflected a plan to carry out such a ritual, the fear of overt or covert ridicule on my part, however, forbidding his admitting it.

858 Although the sex of the first born does not appear to change the initial *umu* ceremony, there is ample evidence that the first born boy, whether or not he is the first child, not only stands in a special relationship to his father but to the powers of the supernatural world as well. From the day of his birth he is seen as being in a "very delicate" situation, to the extent that he is more easily subject to death than are his sisters and later born brothers. Owing to this situation he is treated in a special manner, is continually watched over, and is never allowed to go near such dangerous places as a rough beach or a high cliff. This delicate situation may continue for many years and can only be dissipated, and then completely, upon the death of one of his brothers. Thus, the death of any one of the brothers (of a first born son) liberates the earliest born forever from his close companionship with death, and he is henceforth allowed to travel at will and carries no restrictions, except where his father is concerned.

543 784 858 Throughout life the first born son and his father must carefully observe certain taboos in relation to one another. Neither, for example, may cut the other's hair, for to do so would bring bad luck to the one whose hair was cut. Should the father get sick, the son must not approach him, since to do this would cause the father's death. The reverse is true in the event of illness befalling the first born son. No such taboos appear to hold for the parent-sib relationship of the other children of the family. This special relationship of the father and his first born son was de-

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scribed by Jorge as follows: the father is the head *(mayor)* of the family while the first born son is the head of the children, thus the father and the first born son must stand in special relationship to one another and to the total family.

ADOLESCENCE

There are no formal puberty rites existing on the island today, but the period at which a boy is said to become a man is reasonably well fixed in the minds of the people. According to Jorge and Roberto, in earlier days a boy did not become a man, nor did he do a man's work, until he reached the age of twenty, his time being occupied until then in play and fun. Today, however, most native children go to the Chilean-run school from the ages of nine until twelve, after which the boys, at least, are expected to start doing some work. Thus, when Juan Atan's wife became ill and he was unable to come to work, he sent his thirteen year old son to take his place. Although doing a full day's work at a man's job, this youth was consistently referred to as a *poki*, or boy. Some indication of when he would be regarded as a man was presented on the job one day. My workmen caught the boy examining one of the many pictographs at Orongo called *komari*, which stylistically depict a vulva. The men immediately began to joke him terrifically, and during the joking Jorge turned to me and remarked, "He will be ready for that in another two years." From this, it would appear that fifteen years of age may be taken as the approximate age for a young man to enter into mature sex relations and, in general, become a man.

Further evidence along this line was brought forward during a discussion of who could, or could not, vote in the election of the three natives who stand as representatives of the people before the governor of the island. Among the natives there was no fixed age at which a person could vote, the consistent theme being that one could vote when one became a man. Asked if the Atan youth could vote, they informed me that he could not as he was still a *poki*. It was only after considerable questioning and discussion that my workers came to the conclusion that a person of approximately fifteen or sixteen years of age had reached the age of manhood and had the right to vote. An approximately similar age for womanhood appears to hold for girls, as well. At least a search of the government population records showed the earliest age for the marriage of girls was fifteen.

COURTING

Unmarried girls from about fourteen or fifteen onward are given complete sexual freedom which does not begin and end with a possible suitor but is maintained with any passing boy friend. Such relationships are taken quite as casually

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836 by the people as a necking party is in the United States. There is seldom, if ever, any secrecy surrounding such momentary love matches, and whereas the girls come [522] in for a certain amount of joking from the older people, it is the boys who bear the greater brunt of the jokes. A term commonly heard in such joking sessions is that of *muy tatani* (very devilish) and it is used to describe the feelings of a young [797] man or woman toward his, or her, partner. Such premarital affairs are regarded as quite normal and natural, in spite of the nominal acceptance of the Catholic [892] faith, and, as my workmen once pointed out, a young man is naturally *muy toro* and must have his girls and stay up late at night. However, when a person reaches the age of about thirty he is described as being only *medio torito*.

848 Should a child be born out of wedlock there is never a curse on mother, child, or father. On Easter Island, as in many parts of the rural world, a large family [842] is looked upon as highly desirable since the children can eventually help with the work. With this concept well entrenched in the culture of the island, a girl bringing a child with her into marriage constitutes an advantageous acquisition.

431 A side light on the problems of courting comes from a statement made by
836 Martin Rapu, one of our foremen. Martin reflected that when he was young and unmarried (he is now twenty-two and was married at twenty) he changed girls often and it was much trouble and quiet costly, for he had to give each new girl [581] presents from time to time. Finally his father advised him to get married, for he, the father, could no longer afford the gifts that Martin needed each time he changed girls. Martin then added that he had found married life a lot calmer and more peaceful than that of his premarital years.

584 When a boy has finally decided upon the girl he wants to marry he may ask for her through her parents in one of two ways. He may go personally to the girl's father or mother and ask for the girl. If he is accepted he returns home immediately and notifies his father of the fact. The father then goes to the house of the girl's parents and the two families give a party to which their respective extended family relatives are invited. Both families join in furnishing liquor and food for the affair, though the boy's father may go through the ceremony of pouring the first [583] round of drinks. At this time there appears to be a small exchange of gifts between the families, apparently no more than a token exchange, for Jorge mentioned that a little money might change hands, but in telling of it he did not seem to regard it as much of anything.

The second method of arranging a marriage is for the youth to tell his father of the girl he wishes to marry. It then becomes the father's duty to go to the house of the girl and, bringing with him a little liquor, ask the father or mother of the girl for permission for his son to marry her. Consent appears to be primarily

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up to the parents, though Jorge mentioned that other relatives might be consulted at this time. However, such consultation cannot be long extended, for consent — or rejection — is given very shortly. If accepted, the father of the boy immediately pours some drinks and both families and their relatives are sent for and a party is given that very day. 584

MARRIAGE

When a couple is about to marry, the father of the bridegroom designates one of his brothers to collect presents from the family. Those who are supposed to give at this time are the father's brothers and sisters, cousins, *compadres*, and certain individuals related by marriage.[3] Of considerable interest is the fact that the male members of the father's *tumu*, or — to use the islander's present Spanish term — *aliados*, must give presents at this time.[4] Although the *tumu* no longer operates to the extent that marriage must be within the *tumu*, though such is looked upon with high favor, its continued existence is clearly recognized in that not only do its members give marriage gift-exchange presents to any one of their members whose son or daughter is being married, but they are automatically invited to any feasts given by any member of the *tumu*. 583 602 613 [582]

The gifts collected at this time, which may consist of foodstuffs, cows, pigs, cloth, or money, are turned over to the bridegroom's father who then invites the bride's father and her extended family to a feast, and they come bringing guitars for singing and dancing. After the feast the bridegroom's father presents to the bride's father the accumulated gifts his brother has collected. At such a time the gifts may often be spread out in the form of a boat. 583 584

Some time after the bride's father has received his gifts, one of his brothers or sisters is designated to collect gifts from the bride's family which are then turned over to the bride's father. It is now his turn to invite the bridegroom's father and extended family to his home for a feast, after which the collected gifts are presented to the bridegroom's father. In all of this, the engaged couple receive nothing, for, as Jorge pointed out, when they get married they will have each other and that is sufficient.

Although common law marriages unaccompanied by ceremony still exist, the 583 585

3 I was unable to determine precisely which relatives by marriage must present gifts, in that I found out too late that Easter Islanders use the Spanish word *cuñado*, or brother-in-law, loosely to include husbands of cousins and even nieces, not all of whom are required to give presents.

4 A *tumu* is a group of lineages into which, in former times, a man might marry. The *tumu* to which the Tepano family belongs, for example, consists of the Tepano, Pakomio, and Pate lineages. [582]

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[583] great majority follow a formalized pattern. At the present time two Chilean-
585 derived marriage ceremonies take place, a civil marriage on a Saturday and a
[177] Catholic church marriage on Sunday. However it is on Saturday, after the civil wedding, that the bridegroom's father gives a large feast for both of the extended families involved in the match. It is at this time that the gifts received by the bride's and bridegroom's fathers are formally distributed among their respective families.
[583] To aid in this division of the spoils, a "secretary" is appointed to see that each relative receives a gift of value proportionate to the one he originally gave to the gift exchange. All my informants agreed that the marriage gift-exchange ceremony is a period of great and jovial rivalry to see which family has given the biggest and most valuable gifts.

On Sunday evening after the church wedding a general party for the couple is given, and it is at this time that the bridegroom sings a specially composed song
[533] to his bride and she, in turn, sings her special song to him, each going to the other's house for the purpose. It is the best of these songs that have been maintained on Easter Island and today compose the more modern corpus of true Easter Island songs.

591 Upon the marriage of a young couple they are free to live in the home of either
439 of their parents, or they may build a home of their own. Actually, living with one
648 or another of the parents is a virtual necessity, owing to the fact that all building
135 materials are brought from the continent once a year by the Chilean Navy and the
342 supply has never caught up with the demand. Further hindering construction is the government's rationing system which, though abundantly fair, allows no single family to buy in one year all the material needed to build a home. This system has
[596] resulted in the development, or maintenance, of an extended family pooling system in which, if the family is large enough and each draws his rightful ration of building materials, a house can often be built from the total extended family allotment for a single year. It might also be mentioned that in the construction of such a house, any, or all, of the extended family may be called upon for aid.

423 Although the building of a house is a problem, a young couple as yet has no
648 difficulty in obtaining land. At the present time the Chilean government allots the use-rights to five hectarias of terrain to each newly married couple. Formerly an Easter Islander could own his land outright, but this is no longer true, the Chilean government retaining title to all land, owing, apparently, to the strategic nature of the island in the event of war.

606 One of the more interesting facets of Easter Island marriage is the position of the father-in-law in the life of the married couple. Of the two male parents-in-law, it is the girl's father who appears to hold the dominant position of power in the

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marriage. For example, in discussing what would happen if a husband committed adultery, Jorge explained that if the wife found out, or the husband was "too open" about his affair, not only would the wife become very angry but his father-in-law would come to the house and have a severe talk with him. Again, when Martin Rapu was given an opportunity by the Chilean government to go to the continent it was necessary for him to obtain permission to make the trip from Jorge Tepano, his father-in-law. Jorge refused to consent on the basis that, not only was Martin's house incomplete,[5] but he still owed Jorge several sheets of corrugated iron roofing. Should Martin leave the island he would be unable to return the items, for he would not be included in the following year's ration list. When Martin's father interceded in his son's behalf, Jorge questioned the father by saying, "Why do you want your son to go, for if he goes it is you that must take care of my daughter and that will cost you money."

In this statement we see at least one of the roles of the wife's father-in-law, i.e., as the protector of his son's wife. This role of protector is still very common, if not universal, on the island but, as far as I can gather, comes into play only when the husband is actually leaving the island for any extended time. The responsibilities of this position are fully understood and respected by the wife to the extent that, in one instance, the governor of the island, Commander Curti, was forced to go to a woman's father-in-law to obtain permission for the woman to work for Mrs Curti in the governor's mansion. In this instance the woman was fully mature, being well along in her forties, but her husband had gone to Chile to work and therefore the decision had to be made by her father-in-law.

Further evidence of the important position held by the girl's father in a marriage is seen in the *koro* ceremony which is given by a young husband for his father-in-law to show him what a good son-in-law he has. This is a post-marriage rite which may be given up to a year or two after the couple has married. During the intervening period the husband's extended family helps him collect as many roosters as possible. When a sufficient number have been accumulated, the husband invites his wife's immediate relatives and her extended family to a feast. When the feasting has been completed, the collected roosters appear, each rooster individually tied to a single long rope stretched out upon the ground. There may be from one hundred to one hundred and fifty birds tied to such a rope. With the termination of the feasting the husband presents the string of roosters to his father-

5 I came across several cases on the island where the lack of a house, or the incompleteness of a house, was given as the reason for a man's not taking a trip away from the island. The need to properly house one's family before setting off on a long trip appears paramount in the eyes of the Rapa-nui.

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584 in-law as a gift. The father-in-law accepts the gift and immediately gives a rooster
574 to each of his brothers and sisters. If one of his brothers has given a feast in his
431 honor,[6] he will then take the remainder of the string of birds and drape it over
[606] the neck of this particular brother. In doing this he gives the brother the honor of starting the apportioning of the roosters among the members of the extended family. The brother so honored takes the roosters and gives them to his wife who, after taking one herself, passes the string down through the relatives until each has one of the birds. In this act the brother has, in effect, been given the same honor as that of the "secretary," or *motuha*, who distributes the gifts at the time of a wedding.

174 The strong position of a wife's father may hark back to an earlier custom
584 whereby a mother or father, noting a hard-working bachelor with a good planta-
606 tion of yams, *camote*, sugar cane, etc., presented their daughter to the man for
581 his acceptance or rejection. Neither the desires of the daughter nor the age of the bachelor in relation to the girl's was considered.

584 The operation of such a marriage was described as follows. Noting a hard-working bachelor and seeing in him an opportunity for a "wealthy" marriage for their daughter, the father of the girl would either send his daughter to the man, or more commonly, take her to the bachelor's home. Upon entering the house, the father would ask, "Where are you?" and the bachelor would answer, "Here I am," whereupon the father would leave the girl in the house and say, "Here." If the bachelor accepted the girl he immediately went outside and gathered together chickens, yams, *camotes*, and other foods to make a big *umu* feast for the
[586] girl's father. However, if at some future date the girl's father felt that his daughter's husband was no longer working hard in his fields or at fishing, he had the right to come and take her away and give her to some other man. In extreme cases a girl was allowed to leave her husband and return home.

177 Today such forced marriages no longer exist, but a father may counsel his
584 daughter to marry some hard-working bachelor of his choice. If she refuses he will wait awhile and again counsel her, repeating this advice until she marries the man. As one of my informants put it, "He will keep counseling her until the idea
[581] and the advantages of such a marriage are well in her head." In such marriages one interesting change has been made. No daughter is "counseled" into a marriage with a man too much older than she, for, "See how much older brothers fight with their too young sisters — it is the same with such a marriage."

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6 Presumably this refers to a *hare*, although according to Métraux such feasts honoring a bachelor were not common.

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DIVORCE

Island marriage appears to be a firmer institution today than it was in the not-too-distant past. This is in part due to Chilean governmental authority backing the church in its taboo against divorce. When divorces do occur, they tend to follow the early Polynesian custom of an unceremonious departure of one of the mates. Owing to the island's government frowning upon such action, and its active interest in making the natives understand that the question of divorce is a legal matter, the Easter Islander's attitude toward divorce is at present in a state of flux.

Jorge Tepano reflected the church and governmental attitude when, in discussing the problem, he took the firm stand that divorce could only be obtained on the basis of adultery and that it was for the governor, in his capacity of judge, to determine who was the guilty party and to make a property settlement on the basis of existing Chilean laws. However, this strongly acculturated view is not necessarily adhered to most commonly. Governor Curti informed me of the marriage of a forty-five year old native to a girl of seventeen. This man built a home alongside that of the girl's parents in an effort to make her comfortable, but the girl refused to live with him in the new house. Becoming angry, he tore the house down and put it up on his own parcel of land, demanding that the girl come to live with him. She again refused, and the matter was taken before the governor. There apparently is no law that specifically demands that a wife live with her husband or, if it exists, it is unenforceable on the island. After various attempts at persuasion, the governor used his prerogative of turning over the woman's ration allowance of foods and dry goods to her husband, but when I left the island this action had had no effect upon the woman, her own family having taken up the burden of supporting her. Officially, as long as the girl did not legally marry again, her action could only be looked upon as a separation, though in native eyes it constitutes a divorce in the old style and is accepted as such. Whereas marriages solemnized by civil and religious ceremonies run into legal difficulties in the event of a divorce, common law marriages appear not to have this difficulty, in spite of the fact that, though legally not recognized, they are tacitly accepted officially to the extent that in the island's rationing lists such illegal matches are listed as family units.

DEATH

The Easter Islander appears to have no personal fear of death and, for the most part, looks upon it from a rather fatalistic point of view. A notable exception to this is seen in his superstitious attitude toward Rongo Rongo caves, whose

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tablets are guarded by "devils" that will, in extreme cases, kill a man who stumbles upon such a cave and steals one of the tablets.

I had no time nor opportunity to delve into any beliefs that might exist regarding what happens to a person after death, but I suspect that here the church has made deep inroads, for the dead are now given the last rites of the church and then buried in a Catholic cemetery.

Immediately upon the death of an individual a certain amount of grief will be shown by the immediate kin, but this appears to be more the result of natural shock than of any culturally determined mourning pattern. Between the time of death and the holding of last rites, the body is kept on view in the victim's house, after which it is carried in its coffin to the church where the last rites are administered by the island's priest. As the body is carried from the church to the cemetery the cortege breaks into song. Some of these are of the slow, religious type, but many have an almost gay lilt. During and after the church services there is no overt expression of mourning on the part of the nearest kin, but as the casket is lowered into the ground a near-hysteria of grief breaks out among the closest relatives of the deceased and is explained by my informants on the basis that this is the final separation from a beloved one.

Since, as appears to be the case, the strongest impact of death comes with the physical parting of the dead from the living, one cannot help but wonder if this final show of extreme mourning is a direct result of the more abrupt practices of Christian religion rather than an Easter Island trait of long standing. It was not, after all, many years ago that burial exposure was practiced: by this method, at least the fleshy parts of the body disappear slowly over a length of time — it is only after the bones are left that final burial takes place in a tomb, usually a surface stone structure or a vault within the platform of an *ahu*. The change from a long drawn out physical relationship with the body to a sudden disappearance of a body in a pit, and the change from customary surface burial to sub-surface interment must have required considerable psychological adjustment. Today's overt manifestation of extreme grief as the body is lowered into the ground may, therefore, indicate that this adjustment to a new burial practice is not complete. On the other hand it may, perhaps, reflect a mourning pattern formerly used when the fleshless bones were given their final resting place.

During the evening of the day of burial the family of the deceased gives a large *umu* feast, often including music and dancing, for all visitors. At this time there are certain taboos with regard to the eating of the *umu* food by the immediate family. Thus, if a father dies neither his brothers and sisters, his children, nor his wife may partake of the food thus prepared. If a child has died neither

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of the parents nor the dead child's brothers and sisters may eat the food. Juan Atan explained this taboo by saying that the *umu* was the dead man's body and, should the immediate family eat it, something bad would happen to the entire extended family. He further explained that such an *umu* must be given by the family, otherwise something terrible would happen to them.

Viewing the *umu* as part of the dead man's body may represent an adoption from the church's taking of the sacrament, yet, considering the earlier practice of cannibalism on the island, such a view may hark back to pre-Christian times.

Originally such a death feast was held on the day of death, but its celebration so irked Father Estella that some years ago he condemned the practice and the natives agreed to hold it on the day after death. It now appears that this has been further modified so that it is held on the day of burial.

STABILITY AND CHANGE

The information reported here is admittedly incomplete. Be this as it may, the data, when compared with Métraux's account of ancient life cycle customs on Easter Island, shows a surprising number of carry-overs into modern times.[7] In the course of our work we have also gathered heretofore unreported information on Rapa-nui customs which seem to be indigenous and of some antiquity, notably the delicate situation of the first born son and his relationship with his father, and the position of authority of the parents-in-law of a married couple.

The foremost changes in the life-cycle segment of the social pattern are to be noted in that sector which would most interest the church. Since the Catholic church represents the earliest and most prolonged actively acculturating influence on the island, this is wholly expectable. In the realm of marriage, for example, the church has been included, rather than substituted, in that to the simple rite of marriage involving consent of both families, gift exchange, and marriage feast, the church ritual has been added. Interestingly enough, the church appears to have had little effect upon the indigenous concept of divorce which, until very recently, continued to be an unceremonious splitting up of a husband and wife relationship upon the slightest provocation. Here, however, the government has stepped in and, through attempted Naval enforcement of Chilean divorce laws, has introduced a change in the native idea of divorce to where it now involves the factors of blame and division of community property. For those who have not yet accepted this foreign concept, the old method of divorce has met with such troublesome difficul-

7 Alfred Métraux, *Ethnology of Easter Island* (Bulletin 160, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, pp. 101-119, Honolulu, 1940).

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177 ties from the island's administrators that its incidence in the past few years is said
586 to have dropped noticeably.
648
It is in the matter of death and burial ritual that the church has shown a
177 strong influence amounting to almost complete substitution of foreign for indig-
764 enous custom. However, the ancient feast formerly held on the day of death con-
797 tinues to be celebrated, along with the enforcement of certain eating taboos on the members of the deceased's family. The only influence the church has had on this celebration is to change its time to the day of burial. Whereas most of the natives are now seemingly content to have their deceased relatives go through the church ritual and be buried in the Catholic cemetery, I gathered a number of contemporary accounts of elderly men who, becoming ill, have gone to a secret cave to die. During our visit one old man became sick and disappeared from the village for almost two weeks. Since he worked for the sheep ranch, the administration attempted to find out where he had gone and what had happened to him. Considerable questioning brought forth the same answer, that the old man believed he was about to die and had probably gone to his secret cave.[8] In time he returned, well and healthy, but remained completely vague as to where he had been during his absence. As for the burial of the dead in ancient *ahus*, a secretly practiced custom in 1880,[9] I could learn nothing and, from all indications, this practice has ceased.

177 Beside the government's influence in lowering the incidence of divorce, it has
844 been responsible in no small degree for a certain amount of change in the early
[648] sector of the life cycle. Thus, with the presence of a Naval-controlled hospital, doctor, and midwife, it must be presumed that much of the ancient practice surrounding the delivery of a baby, including the method of tying and severing the umbilical cord, has given way to more modern medical practices. However, it is
114 interesting to note that the early custom of smearing red ocher into the umbilical
177 wound continues up to the present time, along with the ceremonial *umu* given by
852 the father's family to that of the mother, and at which time the mother must still eat the first food.[10] In this connection it should be noted that, while Métraux refers to this *umu* as a feast, my own informants seemed to regard it more as a ceremonial partaking of food.[11] That such may be the case is further strengthened
[178] by their description of an immediately following feast for friends and relatives in celebration of the first born child. The latter is not recorded by Métraux and

8 For an unsuccessful attempt at self-interment in a secret cave in 1922, see P. Sebastian Englert, *La Tierra de Hotu Matu'a* (Santiago, 1948), p. 52.

9 Métraux, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

10 *Idem*, pp. 102-103.

11 *Idem*, p. 103.

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may constitute an innovation. However, it is so typically Rapa-nui in character, even including the interchange of food by the two families involved, that, if it is not old, it certainly represents a change from within the indigenous cultural pattern. That this feast is now breaking down and being supplanted by a European-like party is indicated by Jorge Tepano's plans for the celebration of the birth of a first child to one of his sons. However, the exchange feature continues, although gifts other than food are now beginning to be used.

Of perhaps greater significance is the change being wrought by the local government school, not only via the forced introduction of Spanish, mathematics, and the like, but, indirectly, on the life habits of the adolescent. Not only are the initiation rites of puberty no longer carried out — nor have they been for some time — but the ancient attitude that young men up to the age of marriage should devote their time to pleasurable living has undergone a noticeable modification. It is possible that in this we have an influence from Chile, in that on the continent, which natives have been allowed to visit from time to time, a boy completes his education and goes to work. Although the age for such activity in Chile may be a bit later than on Easter Island, owing to more extensive education, the fact that the island's schooling is completed for a boy at age thirteen may account for the islander's new attitude that this period marks the beginning of work for their youth.

Having noted some of the more important acculturation changes in the life cycle of the Easter Islander, we may now turn briefly to some of the correspondences with ancient custom as determined from Métraux's attempted reconstruction of the culture of the past.

Although the *umu* feast on the third or fifth month of pregnancy appears to have been dropped, the *umu* at the birth of a first child, with its rite of first food for the mother, continues.[12] Whereas the adolescent no longer goes through a puberty rite, and must now engage in a certain amount of work, his earlier freedom of sex life continues unabated. Marriage, including the gift exchange and marriage feast, continues substantially as Métraux described it for the past,[13] except for the inclusion of church ritual and an unexplained, though minor, change in the manner of exhibiting the exchanged gifts. Here Métraux describes a conical framework of poles upon which the items were exhibited, while during my stay on the island I heard numerous references to the gifts being displayed in such a way that they formed a boat.[14]

Of special interest is the continued existence of the *tumu* grouping of lineages,

12 *Idem*, pp. 101, 103.
13 *Idem*, p. 111.
14 *Loc. cit.*

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178 and the *koro* feast which Métraux believed to have probably died out.[15] Our description is that of the *koro* given by a man to his father-in-law which took place in Hangaroa in February, 1956. In the matter of divorce we have noted that there is now a tendency to follow Chilean legal procedure, though simple separation following the ancient pattern continues to exist. In the matter of death and burial a few old men would appear to still hold out for non-Christian interment by the expedient of going to secret caves when they believe they are about to die.

Narrow as this study has been in terms of the total culture pattern of the Easter [114] Islanders, it tends to reveal that far more of the ancient social customs continue to exist than was previously thought by Métraux and others.[16] How much more [648] of the old culture may yet survive is difficult to say, for the Rapa-nui is sensitive to the criticism and derision of his Chilean administrators who have tended to look upon most of his customs as child-like and foolish. The result has been a tendency on the part of the islander to publicly depreciate the role that ancient customs play in his life.

Museum of New Mexico
Santa Fe, New Mexico

15 *Idem*, p. 348.

16 *Idem*, p. 97.

116

116 TEXTS--a full set of pages from each processed source, arranged in page order, as a means of establishing the context for any particular slip. Sets are arranged in the numerical order of the sources. See also:

Literary texts 539

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CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF EASTER ISLAND

By

I. DRAPKIN, M.D.

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CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF EASTER ISLAND*

By I. Drapkin, M.D.

INTRODUCTION

This demographic study is part of a series of undertakings carried 121
out on the spot by the Franco-Belgian Scientific Expedition, under the direction of Mr. A. Métraux, from July 1934 to January 1935. In my capacity as doctor, delegated by the Chilean Government, I took charge of all the researches concerning demography, the sanitary condition of the natives, as well as the formation of natural science collections.

The various data which I endeavored to bring together, systematically arranged, doubtless will contribute to the presentation of a correct idea of the actual demographic condition of the indigenous population of this island.

CENSUS

Most of the navigators who have visited Easter Island since Rog- 161
geveen have made varied and conflicting estimates of the number of 175
the inhabitants. As these estimates had to do with impressions rather than observations founded on exact facts, one should not fail to take that into account.

The first actual census of the population of Easter Island was 162
made at the end of 1886 by Mr. A. A. Salmon, who had arrived a short time before on the American warship *Mohican*. According to Salmon, there were then 155 natives grouped as follows:

Children Under 15 Years	
Male	17
Female	27
Adults	
Male	68
Female	43
Total	155

Thomson,[1] to whom we owe these valuable facts, adds that the 161
number of the natives remained the same during many years, with a 175

* Translated by Margaret Titcomb, Librarian, Bernice P. Bishop Museum.

[1] Thompson, William J., Te pito te henua or Easter Island: Smithsonian Inst., Nat. Mus., Rept., pp. 460-461, 1888-89.

[p. 3]

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161 perfect equilibrium between the births and the deaths. He remarks also that examples of longevity are more frequent in Easter Island [165] than in more favored regions. At this time the oldest man was a chief named Mati, whose exact age was unknown, but both he and his wife must have been 90 years old.

Mrs. Routledge,[2] but especially Knoche,[3] give us in their works on Easter Island certain statistics which I consider necessary to quote here.

In 1900, there were 213 inhabitants. In 1911, there were 228, the two sexes equal in number. In 1912, there were 248, and in 1914, 250. In 1916, the population had reached 273.

162 In 1917, the total population of Easter Island was 301 inhabitants. This number included 3 Europeans, 18 Chileans, and 280 Polynesians, setting aside the question of the pure blood of these last. During 9 months of this year, there were 3 deaths and 12 births.

Until 1922 the situation remained stationary, with the exception of slight fluctuations. There were then 298 inhabitants, among whom were 2 Europeans, 4 Chileans, and 11 of mixed blood, half-foreign. Sexes were divided as follows: 156 men and 142 women. There were 46 children under 3 years, 123 children under 10 years, 36 persons over 50 years, and 9 persons over 80 years.

161 Our census of Easter Island gives, on December 31, 1934, the sum total of 456 natives. I have not included in my statistics the 13 whites who actually live there. These are 1 Frenchman, married to a native, who has lived in the island for 40 years; an Italian, who has been there for 30 years; an Englishman, administrator of the Easter Island Produce Company, with his wife and two sons; another Englishman, subadministrator of the same company; six Chileans, who are the Maritime Commissioner, supreme authority in the island, his wife, his son, the head of the school at Hanga Roa, and two women married to natives.

162 According to age the natives may be divided into five categories:

	Male	Female	Total
Infants under 2 years	32	21	53
Children from 3 to 12 years	86	77	163
Adolescents from 13 to 20 years	45	45	90
Adults from 21 to 50 years	61	67	128
Adults 50 and over	4	18	22
Total	228	228	456

Two interesting facts deserve attention: first, the perfect equilib-

[2] Routledge, Mrs. Scoresby, The mystery of Easter Island, London, p. 149, 1919.
[3] Knoche, Walter, Die Osterinsel, Concepción, Chile, pp. 154-157.

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rium existing between the number of individuals of both sexes, not only in the total number, but also at most of the different stages of life (45 adolescents of the two sexes, for instance); secondly, the large number of old women compared with the old men—only 4 old men over 50, but 18 old women, one of them almost 95 years old (Paulina Viriamo).

DENSITY

Easter Island has an area of approximately 17,900 hectares. The natives have the use of only 2,000 hectares, for the other 15,900 hectares belong to the Produce Company, by virtue of a concession. If from these 2,000 hectares are deducted the government lands and such establishments as roads, the common, the church, school, cemetery, the land of the Commissioner, etc., the extent of the land actually belonging to the natives is reduced to 1,800 hectares, which results in a density of 4 inhabitants to a hectare.

The comparison between the census of Salmon in 1886 and ours in 1934 brings a realization of the rapid increase of the population, which has tripled in less than a half century. The portion of public land occupied by the natives is not one of the most favored for agriculture. If the increase in population continues according to the same rhythm the day will come when the establishment of future families will constitute a veritable problem.

PURE-BLOODED AND MIXED-BLOODED INDIVIDUALS

To distinguish between Easter Islanders of pure and mixed blood is an undertaking not only difficult but indeed impossible. During the whole course of the nineteenth century the island was visited by a great number of ships, the crews of which, on account of the liberty of Polynesian customs, were able to have sex relations with the natives. To these occasional associations there have been added all those which have occurred after the foreign occupation.

It is easy to understand that under such conditions it may be difficult to make a distinction which can claim to be precise between the direct descendants of the old inhabitants and those of mixed blood. Nevertheless, in the hope of making a more or less correct classification, I have resorted to the following method. Taking as a basis the personal information supplied by the individuals themselves, and corroborated by the testimony of the oldest natives and those most reliable in the community, I have considered as pure those who for

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three generations back show no intermixture with foreign elements. By foreigners I mean not only Europeans and Chileans but Polynesians from other islands—Tuamotuans, Tahitians, and others.

Only 159 Easter Islanders, or 34.86 percent of the total population, can be considered of pure blood. The 297 others, or 65.14 percent of the population, show degrees of intermixture varying but evident. A detailed study of degrees of intermixture shows the following individuals with some foreign blood:

Tahitian	184
German	101
French	77
Tuamotuan	53
Chilean	46
English	31
Chinese	6
American	2
Italian	2
Unknown	12

The 12 whose mixed blood is unknown are natural children whose mothers have no certainty or not complete certainty as to the father. [836] This fact has nothing extraordinary about it when one realizes the great sexual liberty which the native women enjoy.

The proportion of foreign blood varies for each one of these crossings from 1/2 to 1/16, that is to say, we have been able in many cases to search back to the fourth generation.

The exact percentage of foreign blood among 297 Easter Island crossings is clear from the following table:

	Percent
Tahitian blood	39.28
Chilean blood	12.90
Tuamotuan blood	11.49
German blood	11.08
French blood	10.00
English blood	8.47
Unknown blood	4.03
Chinese blood	1.20
American blood	0.60
Italian blood	0.60

If these two tables are set side by side one is struck by the fact that the mixtures with Chilean blood have fifth place in the table

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showing the number of individuals with mixed blood, but second place, immediately following the Tahitian, in the table of percentages. This apparent contradiction is explained by the recent influx of Chilean blood, which tends to increase, while Tahitian, German, French and other older strains have a tendency to diminish, so that the proportions of these elements are rather low.

CIVIL REGISTRATION

The great freedom which prevails in sexual relations does not prevent frequent legal marriages. As a general rule, the natives marry young and a celibate over 30 years of age is an exception. In numerous instances widowed persons remarry, especially if still young, and there are widows who have had three or four husbands (Catalina Tori Makotahia, for example).

Therefore, even if one considers as celibates all the young people over 13 years, the percentage of married people remains always greater.

	Individuals	Percent
Married	112	46.66
Celibates	94	38.74
Widowed persons	34	14.60
Total	240	100.00

ILLEGITIMATE AND LEGITIMATE CHILDREN

From 1915 to 1917, following the creation of a government register at Easter Island, almost all the unions which had been given religious consecration were legalized and at the same time the greater number of the children legitimized. That is why we shall consider as illegitimate those children who were born out of wedlock after 1917 and those who were not recognized at that time.

Even with these reservations the number of illegitimate children is fairly high. It amounts to 96, which constitutes 21 percent of the total population.

ILLITERACY

Public instruction in Easter Island until the past year was the most rudimentary. Long periods of no schooling at all alternated with more or less accidental sessions of class work. It was not until 1934 that a public school was organized, always dependent upon the

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[177] 212 Provincial Director of Public Instruction, Valparaiso. It is entirely due to these circumstances that there is a large number of illiterates among the Easter Islanders, in spite of their remarkable intelligence and their extremely keen desire for education.

153 Easter Islanders, in the manner of most of the Polynesians, are of an open, observing nature, having extraordinary faculties for [177] assimilation. They are constantly on the watch for every new bit of knoweldge and adopt with a veritable passion every innovation, material or intellectual. Individuals of exceptional talent should have special advantages. Their present condition does not favor them at all in this respect.

191 177 [648] Because Easter Island belongs to Chile, the official language is Spanish, naturally. Up to the present the Chilean influence consists only of the presence of a Commissioner whose functions include those of Civil Registration Officer and Schoolmaster. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the natives, if they understand Spanish, do not speak it except very badly. Only a small group of individuals are capable of more or less correct expression in this language. The women are even more conservative in their language and traditions; there are few who can carry on a conversation in Spanish.

212 We shall consider as illiterate all natives who do not read or write any language, for quite a number among them read and write the Easter Island language or Tahitian. Without counting the children under 10, of whom there are 183, there are actually 147 illiterates, that is to say 53.85 percent. One hundred and twenty-six, or 46.15 percent, read and write.

VITAL STATISTICS

114 163 165 It would be necessary, in order to complete this brief contribution to the demography of Easter Island, to give statistics for births, mortality, marriage, sanitary conditions, etc. Unfortunately, various circumstances have made this task impossible. The bureau of civil registry, installed at Hanga Roa in 1915, has been neglected. Also no official census of the population has been made until now. In addition, the island is without doctors who could have studied the sanitary conditions and the causes of death. To complete the difficulty, one series of the records of the civil registry has disappeared.

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To satisfy my conscience I shall however publish a few facts that I [114] 163 165 have been able to gather together.

During 17 years, that is to say from 1915 to 1931 inclusive, the percentage of births each year was as follows:

Legitimate	
Male	7
Female	6
Illegitimate	
Male	3
Female	2
Total	18 per year (10 male and 8 female)

The percentage of marriages during 13 years has been three each year (from 1919 to 1931 inclusive). The mortality, during this same period of time, averages 10 each year, 4 children and 6 adults. As to the causes of death and sicknesses in general I can say nothing, for the reasons above stated.